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ABSTRACT

As federal legislation increasingly reflects a view that education is a vehicle for implementing social policy, mandated program evaluation studies often focus on political questions in contrast to educational questions. This study is based on participant-observation data gathered during a two-year evaluation study of Virginia teacher education programs regarding the preparation of teachers to work effectively with minority group students. Political behaviors of the subjects influenced the evaluation design, the evaluation focus, and the quality of the data. Evaluation studies are not only to analyze and assess programs for internal use by the participants but also to inform external publics of the complexities of educational programs and processes. (Author)

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POLITICAL BEHAVIORS MANIFESTED DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTERAGENCY EVALUATION STUDY

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POLITICAL BEHAVIORS MANIFESTED DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTERAGENCY EVALUATION STUDY

To maintain that delicate balance between student needs, demands of the society in which they are to become responsible participants and the resources available for preparation programs, educators frequently conduct needs assessments and evaluation studies. Such studies are primarily for internal use by those educators immediately involved and focus solely on educational questions.

As federal legislation increasingly reflects a view that education is a vehicle for implementing social policy, educators are often required to conduct studies of their programs for external use. Such studies supply data to a federal agency, with the agency often seen as impersonal and removed from the daily complexities and operations of state educational programs. The missions of the federal agency are viewed as that of a "watchdog" and a "time-table monitor" for the implementation of federal policy. It is not unusual for a state educational agency to find itself reacting to these missions by supplying information and conducting evaluation studies. Yet, state educational agencies appear to have little influence over the usage of evaluation studies which may lead to what is viewed as federal interference and unreasonable demands.

Perhaps, even more significantly, administrators of state educational programs appear to have little input into the phrasing of the evaluation question. Thus, educators are often required to conduct an evaluation study focused on essentially a political question instead of an educational question. However, to conduct an evaluation study strictly within the political realm

may be a misrepresentation of an educational program and a disservice to both state institutions and federal agencies.

Although not unique, these observations are based upon data gathered by this writer in a two year study conducted in the teacher education programs in Virginia state supported four-year institutions to assess the preparation of teachers to work effectively with minority group students. What is unique is the various ways which political behaviors were manifested during that two-year period. The context in which these behaviors occurred was the evaluation process for the study, sponsored by the state Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, submitted to the State Council of Higher Education of Virginia, and forwarded to the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This paper focuses on 1) the Deans Committee and the evaluation design, 2) the attempts by the Association to modify the evaluation focus, 3) the quality of multiple kinds of data, and 4) the initial impact of the study.

The Deans Committee and the Evaluation Design

In the early 1970s, HEW notified ten states of possible violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Title VI which required that:

> "No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."[1]

In 1974, HEW accepted The Plan for Equal Opportunity in Virginia's Institutions of Higher Education: A Shared Responsibility. The State Council of Higher Education demonstrated in this document that all state institutions of higher education provided quality education based on an analysis of each

institution's role and scope, resources, level of per capita expenditure, student financial aid, quality of programs, service, number of degree offerings, library holdings, and number and quality of staff. Although the number of blacks attending college and the enrollment of blacks in Virginia's predominately white institutions had increased markedly since 1969, historical traditions seemed to influence enrollment patterns. Two institutions of higher education predominately attracted minority group students.[2]

In compliance with HEW directives, the State Council of Higher Education drew up a four-part plan to modify these enrollment patterns within three years. However, as the Plan stated:

> A young person's aspiration level is a product of a complex variety of factors. Among these factors is the educational experience of the young person from kindergarten through secondary school ... Therefore, the Council will undertake ... a review of all teacher training programs in Virginia's state-supported institutions of higher education. Primary consideration will be given to the quality and amount of training which teachers receive to prepare them to teach minority group students with the greatest possible effectiveness.[3]

The state Association of Colleges of Teacher Education agreed to conduct the study and appointed a Committee of three Deans from different four-year institutions. Although each Dean was to provide a faculty member to assist, it was apparent that a large Committee would impede rather than facilitate the study. A faculty member at the Chairperson's institution with previous research experience in qualitative program evaluation at federal level and broad educational experience and training was assigned to the study.

The Deans Committee served as the "political experts" and sounding board, and official directors of the study. In these capacities, they sanc-

tioned the evaluation design proposed by the evaluator. Although the evaluator attended two Association meetings when the study was discussed prior to data collection, the Deans Committee took the active role in advocating the study. The visibility of the evaluator gradually faded from the Association and eventually from the Deans Committee meetings. When the completed study was presented to the Association, the evaluator was not present. The study was called a "Review" rather than an "Evaluation" of teacher education programs. The study was anonymous, neither the names of the Deans Committee nor the evaluator appeared on it. It was as though the evaluation report had too many unknown political implications for anyone other than the Association to claim authorship.

Each Dean proposed an evaluation design at the first committee meeting. The Deans Committee was interracial and each Dean represented a different kind of teacher education program. Each Dean had a different approach to handling a study with political implications. One Dean assumed the study was a replica of a previous study she had participated in which focused on sex discrimination. She proposed a two category response set (Yes-No) questionnaire on affirmative action. Through the slow process of concensus, the focus of the study was partially clarified. However, this Dean continued during the two-year period to take the position that asking Yes-No questions would suffice in a politically-initiated study and that the less information a teacher education program supplied to external agencies, the more protection this provided the program. This was demonstrated further when she reduced 7 to 14 pages of data on each of the fourteen teacher education programs to a five sentence paragraph about each program. The Deans Committee rejected this draft of the evaluation report.

The Deans Committee took the position that since they could not change the political nature of the evaluation question, then the study should demonstrate the complexities of program development by identifying the unique aspects of each teacher education program. The Committee assumed that if the fourteen teacher education programs were training teachers to work effectively with minority group students, each program would approach it differently. Thus, a seven page questionnaire was developed to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. It focused on required and optional experiences for in-service and pre-service teachers and demographic information on the institution's student body and faculty. Methods to establish internal validity were built into the questionnaire.[4]

The major evaluation problem was one of criteria and the fairness of the criteria - how does one determine if a teacher education program is training teachers to work effectively with minority group students. What is the operational definition of teaching effectiveness in this context? Because there was no recognized criteria or definition in the literature,[5] nor among the Deans Committee, a preliminary study was undertaken. Each of the fourteen teacher education programs was asked to describe briefly what they were doing in this area. Indicators were then developed which could identify whether or not teacher education programs were training teachers for such a purpose. One limitation of the list of indicators was the lack of input from the two teacher education programs which attracted predominately minority group students. These two teacher education programs, because of the composition of their student body, thought to report what their programs were doing to train teachers to work effectively with minority group students was an irrational request.

The Deans Committee also took the position that the aspiration levels of the minority group students could not be solely attributed to their experiences with teachers in K-12 schools, much less to teacher education programs. In fact, at mid-point through the two-year evaluation process, even HEW questioned the relevancy of teacher education programs to changing minority group enrollment patterns in higher education. By now, however, the Governor had directed the State Council of Higher Education to comply strictly with the 1974 plan which included the review of teacher education programs.

The questionnaire was designed primarily to aid the participants in each teacher education program to assess their own program in terms of preparing teachers to work effectively with minority group students. The participants would judge their program and identify needs and report future plans. Ideally, the state-wide study would synthesize and document the assessment process by the fourteen programs. Although one may question the validity of self-report assessment, the most knowledgeable group of any single teacher education program was the participants. In addition, other alternatives for data collection endangered the obtaining of any data!

The Association of Colleges of Teacher Education: Attempts to Change the Evaluation Focus

The evaluation focus, analyzed from an educational view, was illogical and riddled with assumptions. The study assumed that teachers were the primary influencers in raising aspiration levels of minority group students in one direction only - to attend public institutions of higher education. From a political view, the study became more logical. The State Council of Higher Education which proposed the study to HEW lacked the resources and

expertise to conduct a state-wide study on aspiration levels of minority group students or even on the influence of public school teachers on minority group students. But, the State Council of Higher Education could obtain the cooperation of the state-supported teacher education programs to study teacher preparation. Throughout the two-year period, the Association of Colleges of Teacher Education first exhibited confusion over the focus of the study and then apprehensively acquiesced to a comprehensive approach to the study.

Confusion over the evaluation focus occurred when the Deans Committee presented the proposed questionnaire at two general Association meetings. In the May 1975 meeting, the Association members enthusiastically discussed for over an hour how to conduct a study on minority group aspirations. The Deans suggested previous and ongoing research on this topic. The Deans viewed the study as adding to the body of knowledge about minority group aspirations - any kind of aspirations and linked to a number of variables such as SES, role models, school activities, etc.

Slowly the Deans realized the study was not of minority groups per se, but of their own teacher education programs. As the political ramifications of the proposed study began to dawn on the Deans, a stillness pervaded the room.[6] The Deans then reviewed the proposed indicators which would identify teacher education programs which were training teachers to work effectively with minority group students. Because these indicators were based on the preliminary study, each Dean found that some indicators described favorably his/her program. Satisfied that the indicators were fair, the Deans then made suggestions for revising the proposed questionnaire.

The issue arose again in the October 1975 Association meeting, just before the questionnaire was to be sent to each Dean. Once again the Deans protested over the narrow evaluation focus on minority group students. No program had as its sole mission to train teachers to work effectively with minority group students. No program had a course called "Teaching Minority Group Students." Depending upon geographic location, traditions, and the mission of the particular program and institution, minority could be identified as Appalachian, urban, rural, white, or black youth. If minority were limited to the racial definition of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, then some programs, on the surface at least, might appear inadequate. A heated discussion followed as Deans stated that their programs were to prepare teachers to work with all students. Since the political definition of minority could not be changed, it was suggested each Dean supply additional information including the racial definition of minority and their own educational definition of minority.

At the heart of the discussion was the political verses educational focus of the study. These teacher education programs placed students in educational categories - remedial, exceptional, disadvantaged, and by school levels such as elementary, middle, and high school. Training teachers to categorize students by race was as outdated as the Middle Ages to these Deans, yet they had to analyze their teacher preparation programs from this perspective.

As a final note of protest, the Association, upon accepting the completed 80 page report, voted to add a footnote in Chapter One which stated:

> Because this study was conducted within the framework of the State's Plan for Equal Opportunity in Virginia's Institutions of Higher Education, the term "minority" is used in a manner consistent with that report. Because of the great variability of institution and locale, several of the institutions represented in this study find it more appropriate to define "minority" in terms other than racial categories, e.g. academic ability, achievement, social background, etc. Moreover, in our predominately Black colleges, white students would be identified as the primary minority population.[7]

Data Quality and Multiple Kinds of Data

Most of the fourteen teacher education programs completed the extensive questionnaire in a careful and thorough manner, assessing their own programs and identifying needs and resources to train teachers to work more effectively with minority group students. One teacher education program appeared incapable of analyzing its program from this narrow perspective. This program reported the findings in such a manner that it was extremely difficult for the evaluator to identify what was happening.

Teacher education programs approached their self-assessment in different ways. Some described only pre-service education; others included in-service and continuing education; others reported that aspect of the program which most directly involved minority group students, such as special education. Some could not collect data on the number and racial composition of sophomore and/or junior education majors. Some analyzed their program; others assumed that by supplying extensive data without synthesis, that the data "spoke for itself."

The completed study analyzed each program separately and then identified the most common practices used to train teachers to work effectively with minority group students. As the report stated:

> Perhaps the most significant findings are that these teacher education programs are concerned about teacher preparation for minority group instruction as reflected in program goals and these teacher education programs use many and varied procedures to prepare pre-service and in-service school personnel to work effectively with minority group pupils. Both informal and highly structured teacher preparation processes are systematically planned and assessed.[8]

Both the diversity and the extensive amount of teacher preparation to work effectively with minority group students were documented. Teacher preparation programs seemed to vary with the institutional setting, including minor but important variations in program goals, and factors involved in using field-based experiences.

Impact of the Study

An assessment of the immediate impact of the study is tentative, yet important. Each teacher education program became more aware of the need to prepare teachers to work effectively with minority group students. Most programs identified further teacher preparation opportunities and many were already implementing plans. The Association, once each Dean saw that the uniqueness and integrity of his/her program was respected in the final study, was lauditory. "Comments from (the Association) ... members praised ... (the study) ... as a substantial, well-written and 'on target' document."[9]

The Association had provided a valuable service to the State Council of Higher Education. The Council gratefully sent the study to HEW, indicating compliance with federal requests. Despite efforts to re-define minority and the concerns about potential political ramifications of the study, everyone benefited.[10]

Yet, one wonders, if the study had originated from the Association for program development or if teacher education programs informally assessed their programs from this perspective, what would have been the impact? Did teacher education programs become concerned on this issue for only the two-year period when the study was being conducted? Did the administration and faculties begrudgingly review their programs, worthwhile as the analysis might be, to complete a questionnaire and place a report on the shelf? Was the real impact of the study an informal one - an awareness of the issue and the ideas generated among faculties? Although one might argue that a formal study would not have been done with external intervention, one still questions the extent to which political aspects interfered with potential educational benefits.

Conclusions

I do not want to suggest a false dycotomy - that evaluation studies are non-political nor that policy-making questions have little educational value. Instead, the evaluator, the participating institutions, and the external agencies need to be sensitive to the issues involved in asking political questions of complex educational processes and programs. In addition, the study needs to delineate the interrelationships of any single program to those societal forces beyond the control of educators and make explicit the exact evaluation focus.[11] This demands qualitative and quantitative data, professional judgement,[12] and a respect for both the educational and political implications. Evaluation studies are not only to analyze and assess programs for internal use by the participants but also to inform external publics of the complexities of educational programs.

FOOTNOTES

[1]State Council of Higher Education of Virginia, The Plan for Equal Opportunity in Virginia's Institutions of Higher Education: A Shared Responsibility, n.d., p. 7.

[2]Ibid., pp. 9-59.

[3]Ibid., p. 16.

[4]Louis Gottschaulk, Understanding History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950) and Jacques Barzun and Henry Graff, The Modern Researcher (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970).

[5]Ned Flanders and Anita Simon, "Teacher Effectiveness" in Encyclopedia of Educational Research, ed. by Robert Ebel (Toronto, Canada: The Macmillan Company, 1969), pp. 1423-1437; John D. McNiel and W. James Popham, "The Assessment of Teacher Competence" in Second Handbook of Research on Teaching, ed. by Robert W. Travers (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973), pp. 218-244; Bruce Biddle and William Ellena, eds., Contemporary Research on Teacher Effectiveness (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964); Bikker S. Randhawa and Lewis L. W. Fu, "Assessment and Effect of Some Classroom Environmental Variables," Review of Educational Research, XLIII No. 3 (Summer, 1973), pp. 303-322; and Jere E. Brophy, "Stability of Teacher Effectiveness," American Educational Research Journal, X No. 3 (Summer, 1973), pp. 245-252.

[6]See Ernest R. House, "The Conscience of Educational Evaluation" in Ernest R. House, ed., School Evaluation: The Politics and the Process (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Pub. Corp., 1973) where he indicates that educators are enthusiastic about pupil evaluation but not formal evaluations of their own programs.

[7]Virginia Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, A Review of Virginia Teacher Education Programs Regarding the Preparation of Teachers to Work Effectively with Minority Group Students (June, 1976), p. 4.

[8]Ibid., p. 37.

[9]Personal Letter to author from Chairman of Deans Committee, Virginia Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, July 30, 1976.

[10]Virginia officials were surprised when six months later, a federal judge ordered HEW to "draft guidelines within 45 days to desegregate tax-supported colleges in Virginia and five other states." Richmond News Leader, Richmond, Virginia, January 18, 1977, p. 8.

[11]Stephen M. Barrow, "Accountability: Rationale and a Methodology," in David A. Payne, ed., Curriculum Evaluation (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Co., 1974), pp. 34-48.

[12]Ernest R. House, "The Dominion of Economic Accountability," The Educational Forum, (November, 1972), pp. 13-24.